

Our Blessed
Dead

J. H. Jowett

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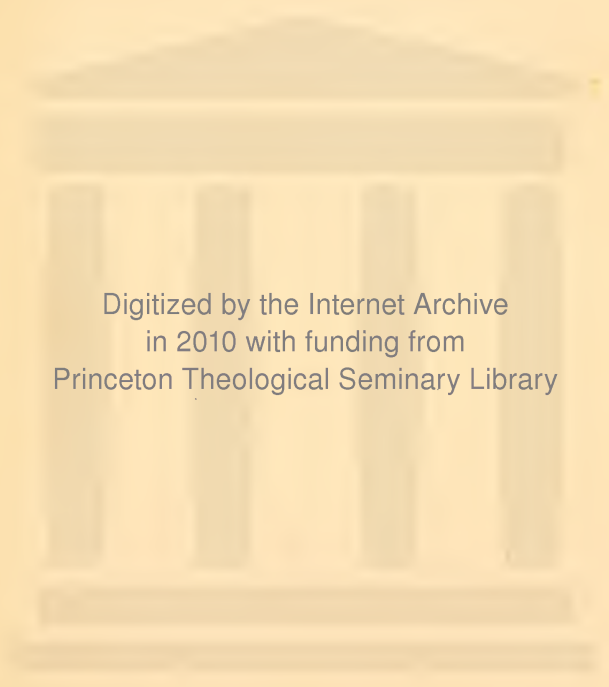
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Our blessed dead



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Our Blessed Dead

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Our Blessed Dead

By
J. H. JOWETT
Author of "The Silver Lining"



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“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors: for their works follow with them.”

—*Revelation xiv. 13.*

“**B**LESSED are the dead which die in the Lord.”

It is one of the supreme tokens of God's grace that we are able to keep our thoughts away from death. The boat of our life is undeviatingly set for that mysterious shore—wind and tide and

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circumstance all conspiring—and yet, we are able to pass whole years of the voyage without a thought of our destination. We can lounge in a deck-chair and read a light romance, and we can enjoy the revel and the games even when the unilluminated mystery is darkening on the horizon. If it were otherwise the springs of life would be poisoned at their source. But it is a marvellous mercy of Providence, a sacred ability conferred by grace, that we are able to sing, and laugh, and work, and play, even in our

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swift passage to the black unknown.

And yet, as the years increase, we do occasionally lift our eyes from the deck-games and scan the horizon, or we let our book lie open in the lap, while the soul goes sounding its lonely way into tracts and circumstances unrevealed. But even then the ruling motive is not so much of fear as of solemn and sobering wonder. What shall we discover, and what will it be like? Will the voyage end in an eternal sleep, or in a short sleep and a great awaken-

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ing? And when "the soul awakens and the shadows flee," what will be the consciousness at the dawning?

And such meditation is not forbidden. Nay, the Christian Scriptures, while they detach our thoughts from death, seek to lure them to the serene glory of the emancipated life. To dwell upon the gloaming might be crippling, to dwell upon the dawning is enriching. And it is the dawning which has been the light and inspiration of the Christian saints, and which has made them brave and songful in the dark and troub-

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led ways of time. "If spared till to-morrow," sings one of these children of the dawn, "I shall have finished the eighty-second year of my pilgrimage. Eighty-two years He has been with me! It was in the year 1830 that I found my Saviour, or rather, that He found me, . . . and I have never parted company with Him all these sixty-two years. More than that, He has given me 'that blessed hope,' the prospect of being forever in the kingdom with Him who has redeemed me by His blood."

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And listen again to the saints. "For several days I have had time and freedom in the forenoon to spend two hours in prayer. To-day, when thus engaged, I was led forward in thought to realize myself standing before the Lamb, without a single sinful tendency, and without one drawback in the way of the slightest uncertainty. 'Forever with the Lord!' Forever with all those holy, happy friends! Forever and forever, holy and without blame, like the Lord Himself!" Nothing you see of the sunset,

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but all of the sunrise! Nothing about the divesting, but all about the robing! Nothing about the putting off of the corruptible, but all about the putting on of incorruption! That is ever the emphasis in the life of the triumphant saints, and that is the emphasis in this benediction from the book of Revelation.

Now, the evangel arises in the midst of a chapter of terrific upheaval and convulsion. It is like some sweet and tender lyric sung in the very thick of a grim and awful tragedy. "Blessed are the

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dead"! That in itself is something to think about, that the beatitude rises in the death-chamber, and rings out its trumpet-peal by the open grave. And yet I am bound to say that this trumpet-peal does not concern the entire cemetery, but only sounds over particular graves. The beatitude is not for the dead, but for "the dead who die in the Lord." Concerning the merely dead we are told little or nothing. All I can say is that down that road the Lord has lit no lamps, and I can see no light, and I have no revela-

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tion. All the light is on the other road, which "shineth more and more even unto perfect day," and it is there that this beatitude is raising its unconquerable strains—"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

I think, therefore, it will be well worth our while to let our thoughts consider the inheritance of the blessed dead. And first of all, we are told that they "die in the Lord." Now, this little preposition "in" signifies a vital union as distinguished from a superficial connection. The superficial con-

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nection with the Lord may be credal, or formal, or ecclesiastical, or denominational, and in all these there may be a fatal absence of all vital fellowship with the Lord. Vital union with Christ is essentially an incorporation. It is not a connection effected by some ecclesiastical knot, some denominational tie, some ritualistic ligament ; it is the living union of the branch with the vine ; it is a communion in whose mystic channels there flows the deepest life of men and God. It is a union so vital and so immediate that if Christ

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be alive the soul must live in Him.

When I had got thus far I thought it might be helpful to get away from my phraseology and to hear the fresher expressions of another. And so I turned to John Pulsford, one of the deepest and rarest mystics of the last generation, a man who suffused the common road with divine radiance, and who was endowed with exquisite spiritual discernment. Well, let me give you a little passage from an assumed dialogue between the creature and the Lord.

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The Creature: "But, O my Lord, if I drink Thy life into my soul, will it not work a great change in the very nature of my soul?"

The Lord: "A great change indeed. Thou hast seen the change from night to day and the change from winter to summer. But the change in thee will be still greater, and more wonderful. My life will do away with death in thee. . . ."

The Creature: "May I hear, my Saviour, how it will do away with death in me?"

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The Lord: "My life will remove death by putting all evil from thee. Silently and gradually, as winter is changed into summer, will my life steal upon thee, until there is no other life in thee."

The Creature: "My holy, gracious Lord, . . . if Thy life goes on changing the nature and form of my inner man, what will the successive changes come to at last?"

The Lord: "At last, in virtue of the kindred nature which My life will generate and perfect in

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thee, thou wilt be able to dwell with Me and to see Me as I am."

Such is life "in Christ"; and "Blessed are the dead" who so "die in the Lord."

And now our beatitude still further unfolds the inheritance of the blessed dead. "*They rest from their labors.*" A word which by no means implies that they settle down to a life of passive idleness. Quite the contrary. At the very heart of this word "labors" there is a sense of faintness and exhaustion! It is a word of burdensomeness, wan and

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drooping, like a stricken plant. The outstanding significance of the word is not the work, but the weariness of the work. Yes, it is a tired word, which has lost its spring! "And Jesus, being *wearied* with His journey"! There you have it, the identical word, carrying the sense of "spentness," of limitation, of exhaustion. And therefore when we are told that "the dead in Christ" "rest from their labors," we are not to take it as meaning that they rest from their work, but from the weariness of work, which is a far

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nobler emancipation. To take away the faintness is infinitely more gracious than to take us out of the crusade. The redemption of our blessed dead is redemption from tiredness, redemption from the limitations which arise from small capital; it is redemption from the drooping and the withering; it is entry into the tireless life.

“There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers!”

That is the word which carries the grace of the evangel—“never-withering”—the land where the

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inhabitants never say, "I am sick." And so we might very accurately paraphrase the familiar sentence in our beatitude as follows: "They rest from the laboriousness of labor," and great services become their native delight. "They serve Him day and night in His temple."

Now, it is not difficult to name some of the things which make present labor so laborsome, and from which the blessed dead have found their freedom. There are the limitations of the body. We so soon begin to encroach upon

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our physical capital, and the laboring body becomes a drag upon the eager spirit. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Even the evangelization of the world must tarry while "Jesus, being wearied, sat thus by the well." How much more we could presumably do for the kingdom if the vital flame did not so speedily smoulder and flicker down into its socket! But it is evident that here our very tiredness is a necessary factor in the campaign, and that the frailty of the body is the mysterious

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servant of the spirit. But our blessed dead "drop the robe of flesh," because its ministry is ended, and "they rest from the labor" and travail of physical infirmity.

But there is a second element of laboriousness which burdens our temporal service, and that is the seeming fruitlessness of present labor. We toil at the wilderness for years, and it appears a wilderness still. And because we cannot see flowers and fruits we become despondent about growth. Because we are not always seeing

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results we become dubious about processes. And we grow faint and weary, and the song goes out of our work, and the gay service becomes a humdrum task. Such despair is ever our peril, but it need never be our necessity. There have been men who have toiled and toiled at their desert-patch, and even when no green blade has appeared to cheer the grim waste they have "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." But, apart from this, we have not the eyes as yet to see the sure ministries of spiritual processes

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going on in the secret place. Our eyes are holden, there are necessary veils, earth-clouds form about us, and "we walk by faith and not by sight." But our blessed dead, when they pass behind the veil, become superior to the veil, and every veil becomes transparent. They look "with other eyes than ours," they see the first awakenings of mighty destinies, they trace the river from its spring, they "know even as also they are known," they have the open vision, and they rest from the laboriousness of uncertain service.

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And there is one further element in the burdensomeness of present labors, and that is our broken correspondence with God. God is not always real enough to be impressive. Sometimes He seems so gloriously real and immediate that the intervening veil is only like a bridal-veil, and we can almost see His face! "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord." But the alien season returns, and the bridal-veil becomes a fog, and the soul cries out, "O that I knew where I might find Him!" And the

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seeming nearness or distance of the Lord makes all the difference to the buoyancy or the weariness of our work. But our blessed dead know neither bridal-veil nor fog. They have died into the open glory, into the fellowship where there is no night, the land of which "the Lamb is the light thereof," and where service is always in the sunshine, "and sorrow and sighing have passed away." They see God, and they rest from the laboriousness of broken communion.

And one word on the remaining

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strain in the beatitude: "*Their works follow with them.*" They enter the land of glory like monarchs with princely retinues, and their retinue is the radiant assemblage of good works which they have done in their pilgrimage through time. Those chivalrous doings reappear at the gates of day, and like manifested spiritual presences they accompany the soul into "the burning bliss" of the presence of God. "Their works follow with them." And the glorious retinue of some of our earthly obscurities will be

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matter of great surprise when the secrets of men are revealed. And so "Blessed," aye, thrice blessed, "are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them."

"O blest communion! Fellowship
divine!

We feebly struggle, they in glory
shine:

Yet all are one in Thee, for all are
Thine.

Alleluia!"

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